SARON MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Saron Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)
510 Main Street
St. Joseph, MI 49085

Website: www.saronlutheran.org
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
Phone: 269-983-1273
Facebook:www.facebook.com/saronlutheranchurchst.joseph

Saron's Mission: ***Joyfully sharing God's love for all!!!***

Reverend James E. Smith, Pastor
Cell: 269-816-3870
Email: pastorjames@saronlutheran.org

Amanda Bradley, Communications Director
Cell: 419-306-5780
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
bradley717@gmail.com

Marcus Roll, Music Director
Email: roll.marcus17@gmail.com

Beth Gray, Organist/Pianist
Email: egrayroll@gmail.com

Ken Boyd, Bookkeeper
Email: financial@saronlutheran.org

Mackenzie Dressander, Nursery Director
Email: mackenzie.trail99@gmail.com

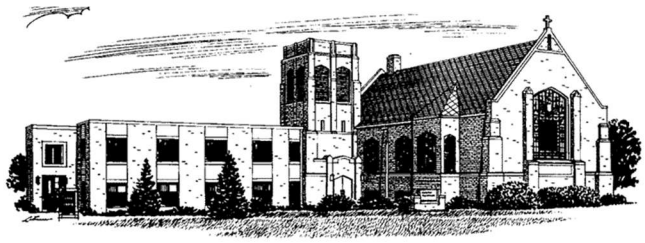
Typical Sunday at Saron:

Fall, Winter and Spring **(through May 17, 2026):**
8:30am Worship On-Location
9:40am-10:30am Adult Bible Study
10am-10:45am Learning Hour for Ages 3-8th Grade
11am Worship with Zoom Option
Nursery Available

Summer Schedule (**begins May 25, 2026**):
10am Worship
On-Location and via Zoom
Nursery Available
No Learning Hour

We hold in prayer:
The Rev. Yehiel Curry,
Presiding Bishop, ELCA
The Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Bishop of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, ELCA
The Episcopal Diocese of the Great Lakes

Our Companion Synods:
Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras
Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea
Lutheran Church of Latvia



Salt and Light

A lot happened in January. Strikes and threats abroad. Domestically, we have seen massive protests in response to ICE raids on American communities. Most tragically, we have seen two fellow Americans killed by federal agents. How do we live in this moment?

Our Christian faith helps me work through questions in challenging times. In worship this month, we will hear a couple stories I want to highlight.

On February 1, the prophet Micah ventriloquizes a confused people with the basic question of "How can I come before God? What should I do?" Micah says, "He [God] has told you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you, but to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God?"

Seek justice. The church cares about justice because justice matters to God. Every human being bears God's image and is precious in God's sight. God really cares that everyone has a home to live in, food to eat, freedom to think, people to love—irrespective of one's views, language, skin color, or origin. And God has trusted us humans with the awesome responsibility of governing wisely so that justice is respected for all of God's children and indeed all of God's creation.

Love mercy. Sometimes translated "love kindness." We have witnessed appalling displays of cruelty. *Mercy* is responding to cruelty not by descending to that level, but by showing *kindness*. *Kyrie eleison: Lord, have mercy*, we pray. This is really hard. Let's work on this fruit of the Spirit together. God has promised to bless our work.

Walk humbly with your God. Humility is unfashionable, especially in emergencies. But to move forward to a better future for our common humanity, it will take a lot of humility to listen to each other and acknowledge we do not have all the answers.

Jesus gives images for how Christians are to walk this way in the world in the reading for Feb. 8 when he compares Christians to "salt" and "light." Salt draws out the good flavor of the world. Light shows people a better way. In these times when we can feel powerless, each of us can be a grain of salt, a candle of light for God and for our neighbors in this world that God loves.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor James E. Smith

General Information

OFFICE HOURS

Pastor James E. Smith
Monday – Thursday
Hours may vary. Appointments are great!
Amanda Bradley (Admin Assistant):
Mondays & Thursdays 10am-2pm
Ken Boyd (Bookkeeper):
Thursday Mornings and by Appointment
Helping Hands Office Volunteers:
Wednesdays 9:00am-11am (approx)

If you or your loved one is need of a visit or pastoral care, please contact Pastor James at 269-816-3870.

Specific questions or concerns may be directed to an appropriate council member or committee liaison:

President – ??
Vice President – ??
Secretary – ??
Treasurer – ??
Worship – ??
Learning – ??
Outreach – ??
Facilities – ??
Youth – ??
Support – ??
Hospitality – ??

COMING SOON!
Check back next month after positions have been assigned at the Council Retreat on 2/21!

Caring and Sharing

Happy Birthday Wishes to Saron's Members!

2/2 Lindsay Gaspari
2/2 Kate Kohs
2/3 Fran Bolson
2/3 Makayla Bradley
2/5 Helen Peters-Totzke
2/6 Mary Alice Brunner
2/9 Frieda Williams
2/10 Aiden Ashley
2/11 Kyle Carter
2/15 Hazel Kohs
2/21 Edmund Staude
2/22 Darlene Kiessel
2/22 Hailey Talbert
2/24 Doug Wold
2/28 Cheryl Houser

Happy Anniversary Wishes to Saron's Members!

We don't have any anniversaries on our list for February. We hope all of our members have a month of appreciating those they love, including those loved and lost.

If there are any omissions from the birthday or anniversary list, or if a date is incorrect, please let us know so we can get it correct in the future!

Congratulations

Pastor James was honored to officiate his first wedding at Saron on January 1, 2026.

Congratulations to
Helen & Don LeBlanc
as they begin their next chapter together!

Helen & Don are in the process of joining Saron as members. Saron is excited to be part of your lives and faith journey!

LENT IS AROUND THE CORNER!

February 18
12:15pm & 7pm

Wednesday Soup Suppers & Prayer:

Pray Without Ceasing. This Lent, we are inviting Saron and all Christians to join us in praying for peace, our country, our leaders, the vulnerable, and all of God's children. Ed Staude and Pr. James will lead us through five Wednesdays of themed prayer beginning on **February 25**. **Soup suppers will be at 6:15pm with prayer to follow at 7pm**. Please invite your family, friends, or anyone else who might find this opportunity helpful!

NOTE: watch for our beautifully embellished canvas prayer labyrinth to return for Lent!

WEDNESDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY

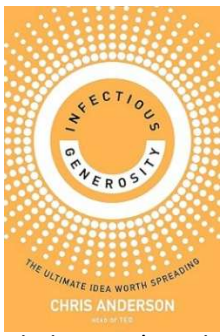
Acts of Faith: Tongues of fire, a *Treasure Island*-style sea voyage, Paul's preaching literally boring a man to death: the book of Acts is a feast of the works of the Holy Spirit! Join our Wednesday morning Bible study as we continue to explore this "act"ion-packed book on **Wednesdays at 9:30am in the upstairs lounge**. No special materials needed. Come when you can! We will continue to meet throughout Lent. Contact Pastor James with questions.

TUESDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY

This group is focusing on the lessons of the week until **February 17**, then break for Lent. Join us when you can on **Tuesday evenings at 6pm in the upstairs lounge**. We meet for one hour of discussion, then adjourn to a local restaurant for food and fellowship. All are welcome!

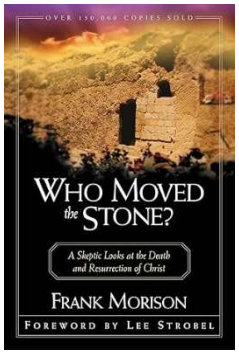
If you have any questions, feel free to call, text, or email:
Don Hafer (269/985-3637, haferdon@gmail.com)
Ed Staude (636/288-1016, staude.edmund@gmail.com)
Eric Standen (269/759-3556, dande-standen@sbcglobal.net)
Pr. James (269/816-3870, pastorjames@saronlutheran.org)

BOOK CLUB



February 1 at 6:30pm will find us in the upstairs lounge ready to discuss *Infectious Generosity: The Ultimate Idea Worth Spreading* by Chris Anderson. The title just about says it all, especially for the times we are living in right now. Chris Anderson is the head of TED and has a view of the word's boldest thinkers sharing their most uplifting ideas. He believes it's within our grasp to turn outrage back into optimism. What if generosity could become infectious generosity? Join us and find out what others think of this idea.

Then on **March 1**, we will delve into another non-fiction selection titled *Who Moved the Stone?* by Frank Morison. Morison is a skeptic looking at the death and Resurrection of Christ. Join us and see where Morison's skepticism takes him as we prepare for Lent.


OVER 150,000 COPIES SOLD
WHO MOVED the STONE?
A Skeptic Looks at the Death and Resurrection of Christ
FRANK MORISON
FOREWORD BY LEE STROBEL

All are welcome to be a part of this group for any book that catches your interest. We promise an interesting discussion and good fellowship. Come be a part of the sharing of thoughts and ideas!

Questions? **Contact Kathy Cowall at 269-428-0354 or kcowall@hotmail.com.**

We read to know we're not alone.
- William Nicholson

FORUM & fellowship

This group typically meets the 2nd & 4th Sundays of the month at 6:30pm in the upstairs lounge. We will take off February 8 so you can enjoy the Super Bowl then break for Lent. Watch your emails for topics we'll tackle after Easter!

Contact Ed Staude at 636/288-1016 with any questions or topic suggestions.

Women of the ELCA

DEBORAH CIRCLE

Deborah Circle will meet at **7pm on Wednesday, February 11, in the church upstairs lounge**. Mary Alice Brunner will be the study leader. Additional details will be sent in a group email closer to the meeting.

Contact Melanie at 269/449-8399 with any questions.

Installation of Officers & Leaders
January 25, 2026

Hospitality

SUNDAY SNACKS

Who doesn't love a snack during a time of fellowship after the service? If you would like to be a Sunday snack host, sign up via the link in our weekly email or call/email the office so Amanda can sign you up. Please plan for at least 30 to partake. Thank you!

Outreach

NOISY OFFERING

We receive a noisy offering (and those not-so-noisy bills) on the first Sunday of each month.
These gifts are sent to ELCA World Hunger.

Saron is consistently ranked as a top 10 contributor to this effort. Thank you for your continued support!

EYE GLASS COLLECTION

Do you have old glasses sitting in a drawer?

The Lions Club has provided a collection box for the narthex. We have several members who are Lions that can deliver our glasses to the club where they will do more good out in our community.

Thank you!

THE BENTON HARBOR SOUP KITCHEN™ HEART-TO-HEART™

For I was hungry and you gave me food.
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.
I was a stranger and you welcomed me.
Matthew 25:35

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Saron members & friends for your generous support of the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen Ministry in 2025. Your help in preparing lunches, baking cookies and providing monetary donations enabled us to serve 1500 meals to those in need. We are truly grateful for your kindness, time and prayers as we continue this ministry in 2026.

We also continue to be thankful to Red Lotus Nutrition for allowing us to use their commercial kitchen to prepare sack lunches while we anxiously await word the renovations on the new Soup Kitchen are finally complete and we can return to serving a warm meal. If you would like to help prepare food or bake cookies, please use the link in the weekly email or contact **Kathie Bradley at 269/921-4665**.

Thank you again to all who continue to support this ministry with your time, contributions, and prayers.
Joyfully sharing God's love for all!

INCLUSIVITY TASK FORCE

The Inclusivity Task Force is committed to extending a welcome to all. Our congregation adopted the following welcome statement and is a **Reconciling in Christ** church.

As a community of faith who *joyfully shares God's love for all*, we believe our lives and faith are strengthened by diversity. We strive to be a community who welcomes people of every ability, age, citizenship status, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, marital status, political perspective, race, and sexual orientation. We are committed to the work of racial equity. Whatever life's circumstance, we openly welcome and value you. We celebrate God's unconditional love and respond joyfully to your presence here. All are welcome. You are welcome.

If you ever have any questions on our inclusivity journey, please feel free to call any one of the task force members:
Lindsay Gaspari:847/373-8826 lindsay.gaspari@yahoo.com
Meredith Gacek:269/235-4530 meredithgacek@yahoo.com

Interfaith Action

Interfaith Action (swmichiganinterfaith.org) is a coalition of over 40 faith communities in Allegan, Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, and Van Buren Counties. Some members of Saron attend meetings and work with various task force groups. One of the goals of Interfaith Action is to promote understanding and respect for diversity.

Contact Pastor James or Merrily Smith at merrilyannsmith@gmail.com for more information on this group.

Support

The Support Committee typically meets the Tuesday before the third Monday of the month at 8pm via Zoom. Contact Don Hafer with any questions at 269/985-3637.

STOCK DONATIONS

Saron partners with a brokerage firm to accept stock donations. If you would like to donate stock, email Ed Brunner at ebrunner54@gmail.com to receive more information. Thanks!

Facilities

HELPING HANDS

We do all sorts of things from building maintenance to preps for worship in the sanctuary to assembling bulletins and newsletters and so much more. We meet on Wednesdays around 9am and know you are invited – whatever your age, gender, or ability. There is a job for you to use your helping hands!

Miscellaneous Bits of News

New Members Are Joining

We have several people interested in joining our Saron family soon. If you would like to be included, or would like to learn more about Saron and the Lutheran tradition, contact Pastor James at pastorjames@saronlutheran.org.

Saron Lutheran Church

1875 | 150th Anniversary | 2025

And That's a Wrap!

We celebrated the end of our 150th year with a finale event that included Bishop Julie Schneider-Thomas, our Bell Choir, closing remarks by Kristen Harper, posters with pictures from our year and treats! Thanks to all who made this year fun and meaningful!

Solidarity with Minneapolis: Prayer, Testimony & Action
Wednesday, February 4 at 6:30pm
First Congregational Church

Members of Saron and our surrounding community are invited to gather for an evening of prayer in solidarity with Minneapolis. We will hear area faith leaders share their experiences of attending the march in Minneapolis on January 23 and we will consider how we, as a community, can be voices of justice and peace for our sisters and brothers in Minnesota and across the country. For questions or details, contact Pr. James.

Worship

ASSISTED HEARING DEVICES

Our sound system in the sanctuary came with headphones to assist those having difficulty hearing the worship service. If you are interested, ask Marcus if you can try one out.

SENSORY BAGS

As part of extending an unconditional welcome to all, we have Sensory Bags available for use. These bags contain a variety of fidgets that can help someone feel more able to sit quietly and/or focus. We also have noise canceling headphones for those who are sound sensitive. These brightly colored bags can be found in the narthex.

PRAYER GROUP

You are invited to offer your concerns or thanksgivings via our attendance cards each Sunday. Requests can also be made online via a link in our Thursday email. You may include as much, or little, detail as you wish. Requests are then given to the Monday prayer group. **You are invited to be part of this Monday group at 11am.** We follow a simple format of morning prayer and insert the petitions and prayers for Saron's ministry and the world. Most weeks we are done in 30 minutes.

ALTAR FLOWERS

Sponsor a week by using the link in the weekly email or by contacting the church office. Please note any occasion/thanksgiving to be recognized in the bulletin. **Flowers are now $40 per vase.** Checks are payable to Saron with "Flowers" as the memo. Take them home to enjoy then please **return the vase.**

Nursery service is available during worship for children under five years old (exceptions are made, especially for siblings). There is a live-feed monitor in the nursery where you may keep up with the service if you need to stay with your child. For children five and older, there are options to bring into the sanctuary, such as clipboards with coloring pages, sensory bags (see article above) and children's bulletins. If you need to step out with them to regroup, there are quiet activities in a bin next to the sofa in the narthex. We embrace family units in all stages and welcome wiggles & giggles as a part of worship.

We recognize the worship experience for families may not look the same for all and encourage sharing concerns and suggestions with Mackenzie Dressander (269/944-7753). Please also contact her if you are willing to volunteer to support this important service.

SUNDAY SCRIPTURE READINGS

As you prepare for worship, you are invited to read and reflect on the Scriptures for the day.

February 1: 4th Sunday after Epiphany
Micah 6:1-8
Psalm 15
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Matthew 5:1-12

February 8: 5th Sunday after Epiphany
Isaiah 58:1-9
Psalm 112:1-10
1 Corinthians 2:1-16
Matthew 5:13-20

February 15: Transfiguration of Our Lord
Exodus 24:12-18
Psalm 2
2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 17:1-9

February 22: 1st Sunday in Lent
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7
Psalm 32
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11

Youth Group (middle school & high school age) is still trying to work out a schedule for meetings that will work for our busy students/athletes/artists.

Learning

SUNDAY LEARNING HOUR

The Learning Hour offers the following options:

- 9:40am-10:30am Adult Forum: High School - Adult
- 10am-10:45am Confirmation: Grades 6-8
- 10am-10:45am Sunday School: Preschool - Grade 5
    - New Classroom!
    - New Curriculum!
    - New Friends!

We will be sharing the theme for our 2026 VBS soon!

SARON LUTHERAN CHURCH
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A Congregation of:
The North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

FEBRUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER

Join us

Sunday, February 8

12:15pm

for fellowship and chili - a winning combination!

Bring your best chili recipe and we'll see which pot comes out on top! Sign-up using the link in the weekly email, on the clipboard in the narthex, or by contacting Ed Staude at 636/288-1016. We need desserts and fixings too!

This year we are using this event to support **Marine Combat Logistics Battalion 26.** There will be a table for making welcome home signs for the barrack doors for when they return from deployment. We're also making care kits to help with the transition back to Camp Lejeune.

We are looking for donations of hygiene items (bar soap, shaving cream, disposable razors, antiperspirant, tooth brushes/paste...), new towels and washcloths, hand soap, and some treats (candy bars). Items can be brought in between now and February 8. Any monetary donations made at the Super Chili Bowl will go towards buying additional items and towards postage. Thank you for your help showing this group some love!

FEBRUARY 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**2** 11am Prayer Group	**3** 6pm Bible Study	**4** 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study **6:30pm Minnesota Prayer, Testimony & Action at First Cong Church**	**5** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**6**	**7**
8 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option **12:15pm Super Chili Bowl**	**9** 11am Prayer Group	**10** 6pm Bible Study 8pm Support Meeting	**11** 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study	**12** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**13**	**14**
15 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**16** 11am Prayer Group **Newsletter Articles Due**	**17** 6pm Bible Study	**18** 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study **12:15pm & 7pm Ash Wednesday Worship**	**19** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**20**	**21** 9am Council Retreat to Assign Officers & Liaisons
22 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**23** 11am Prayer Group	**24**	**25** 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study **6:15pm Lenten Soup Supper & Prayer (7pm)**	**26** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal **Soup Kitchen**	**28**	